

## Of light and shadow

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### I - Oscillations

Facchinetti's painting has always been staggeringly oscillating between a subtly refined figuration and an energetic and gestural informal abstraction, between vague references to Francis Bacon or Giacometti and more deliberate references to Franz Kline, Emilio Vedova and Hans Hartung. Without ever confusing the two fronts, without the two parallel universes ever meeting.

The figurative art of the artist from Bergamo seems to have little to do with his Informal painting. Indeed, at times, the two modes of expression seem quite antithetical. A skilful and controlled drawing in the portraits as opposed to a violent and emotional gesture in the abstract paintings.

A faded and "atmospheric" colour laid with a soft brush or with delicate touches of pastel in the portraits clashes with the slashes of bright and primary colours savagely applied to the canvas with strokes of the spatula in the informal abstract paintings.

On both fronts the artist appears to be self assured, consistent and recognizable. On both fronts we can identify and define, over the years, a path, an evolution: the maturation of a style. Actually two styles: Paolo Facchinetti one and two. Facchinetti like a two-faces Janus.

And this would force us (as it has indeed in the past) into a critical double-edged discourse. Indeed, even better, into two critical discourses clearly separated from each other, where one can at the most emphasize the antithetic and parallel relationship existing between the two expressive lines. Like a thesis and an antithesis that never reach a synthesis.

But at one point, something changes and these two parallel universes, as if subjected to a force of attraction, of cosmic contraction, appear to get closer, or at least they seem to respond to similar laws.

### II - Subtraction and invention

Between 2010 and 2011, Paolo Facchinetti's art finds notes of great and effective formal synthesis. On both fronts his creative process shows an extreme concentration and at the same time, a rise, a flash, a stroke of genius.

The synthesis, the contraction coincides with a twofold minimization of his means of expression: a reduction of the use of colour practically to black only and of the action of painting to a single repeated gesture: the "scratch" in the abstract and the "stamp" in the figurative. The rigour is absolute. Maniac in his repetition of the gesture and monastic in his sacrifice of the usual vibrant chromatic spectrum. In many of his works and for a long time the black-only reigns supreme, undisputed despot, even if later the polychromy breaks in again overwhelmingly, especially in his abstract works, while in the figurative

works, at a certain point, the colour comes back flashing in spots. Spots that ultimately enhance, by contrast, the black and white base.

And on both creative fronts, a sudden and astonishing invention appears, it's a technical idea that results in a stylistic change: on the figurative side, Facchinetti gives up the brush and the pencils and starts painting and drawing his portraits or his vanitas using stamps dipped in black. In his abstract works, the devised technique is equally new and impressive, but more layered: photographs, or computer edited images of beams of light and shadows are printed on sheets of metal and then covered with black oil colour which is later scratched away in horizontal or vertical stripes, revealing from beneath the lights and the shadows and the flashes of the metal.

In both cases, with two different but equally effective devices, he gets the same paradoxical effect: that is, giving depth to paintings where the bidimensionality is enhanced at its best by the monochromy and by the reiteration of the gesture on the surface.

In the case of his portraits and vanitates the three-dimensional effect is reached through the skilful alternation of stamps of different sizes applied on the canvas with either greater or lesser pressure. In the abstract works the surfacing shadows and lights of the photos printed underneath give an illusion of depth and overlapping planes.

### **III - Short Circuit**

In any case, for the first time, even though in a limited number of works, the abstract and figurative paintings reveal some common features (the black, the repetition of the gesture, the invention of a new technique) and ultimately the same underlying need, the same urgency, the same expressive tension that becomes a method of approach, a system: that is, a fierce desire of reducing to a minimum his expressive tools (one colour only, a sole repeated gesture) and the paradoxical use of a paratactic construction in order to give life to a syntactic narration. And thus, the same, repeated, juxtaposed and two-dimensional signs are made up to appear different, hierarchically structured and three-dimensional.

And in this last aspect Facchinetti reveals to be, at the same time, ancient and contemporary. As a contemporary artist, he uses parataxis, as a framework for his works, but his nostalgia for the evocative power of the syntax (and "narration") is evident and makes him turn the parataxis towards new and unusual boundaries, which are subtly catching off-guard and deliberately contradictory. He does abstract-informal-gestural painting using less conventional means: such as the reworking of the images on the computer and the printing on metal, techniques borrowed from computer-art and photography, for "conventional" purposes. The same is true for the use of the stamps to make portraits: a tool suitable more to a serial or minimalist-inspired art is "improperly" used to make up an essentially classical figurative painting.

This generates a kind of short circuit between the means of expression and the expressed artwork. A contradiction that becomes revelation, because it stems from a twofold need: on one hand the need to be contemporary, using media and languages,

and contemporary patterns of expression; on the other hand the inability to give up a sort of classical narrative construction. This happens also in his making of abstract paintings. In fact the creation of overlapping planes, the illusion of depth in the abstract works of Facchinetti fulfil a need of structuring the painting for evocative, allusive and therefore, to some extent, potentially “narrative” purposes: a foreground and a background, the gleam of light from darkness or vice versa the shadows that fall on areas of light... they all hint at a distance to be covered, at a possibility of action, at an atmosphere charged with anticipation and anxiety, at something that could happen. Perhaps something tragic.

#### **IV - The sense of the tragic**

The contrasts in Facchinetti do not heal. Thesis and antithesis don't find a synthesis. The conflict between light and shadow is endless and without resolution. Penumbra non datur. The horizontal and vertical lines don't generate diagonals. This is the strength of his pictures.

In the figurative works, in the portraits, the direct clash, the aporia lies between stasis and movement, between space and time, between the looming physical presence of the figure, of the face, and its instability, its evanescence, its transience. In philosophical terms, the irreconcilable conflict lies between being and becoming, between the condensed matter and its expansion, its explosion until dissolution. But the matter in question is the black colour printed by a stamp on the canvas, with an apparently impersonal gesture. The matter is the black, the shadow. Facchinetti draws faces and skulls with stamps of shadow. The mark is the Shadow. And so it does not seem to be a coincidence or a literary affectation, the appearing of the very classical theme of the vanitas: the skull.

In the abstract paintings of the last two years, the conflict is actually threefold: between horizontal and vertical lines, between light and shadow, and between soft sign, “flou” and a striking scratch. The abscissa and the ordinate do not meet. The forces move in orthogonally opposite directions, without meeting, without melting. The horizontal scratches overlap or more often juxtapose to the vertical ones, generating tensions. The light is the result of erasures on the metal surface covered by the colour; while the shadow emerges, soft and fuzzy, almost evanescent, or falls in wide stripes with undefined outlines. The shadow is a soft enveloping cloth. Light is a scratch that hurts. But the contrast between the two presences is incurable. Yes, they are two presences, because the shadow, in Facchinetti, is not absence of light, but immanent, inevitable and looming presence. Or even better, it is the light that is absence of shadow, lack, negation.

Not that all this was not there before, but now the extreme rigor of these works brutally exposes the schemata, and, at the same time, makes them more powerfully effective. And how else can we describe the unresolved conflict between light and shadow, between being and becoming, between caress and scratch, between horizontality and verticality, if not with the old and forgotten word of “tragedy”?

It is up to each one of us, if we so wish, at this point, to understand the metaphorical

implications of some of these opposing poles: light and shadow, caress and scratch,  
horizontal and vertical...